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Advertising Colonial Romance and Imperial Masculinity: The Promotion of Philip Meadows Taylor's Novels in Britain

ASHOK MALHOTRA

Let it be carefully remembered that not every book which has a literary has also a commercial value; and that one is not necessarily in any degree the measure of the other. If a book is transcendently good on any subject, it will, no doubt, sooner or later, succeed; if it is bad, it will sometimes succeed because of its very badness—it may appeal to the vulgar, or the base, or the trivial. If the writer not be a Robertson as a preacher, or a Macaulay as a historian, a George Eliot as a novelist, or a Browning as a poet, if he be one of the average public who has written a fairly good book, success will depend on whether the book at the moment hits the fancy of the public or supplies a want just then felt: it rarely creates the demand.

Charles Kegan Paul (1883)¹

Service to the Customer.—The Culture industry piously claims to be guided by its customers and to supply them with what they ask for. But while assiduously dismissing any thought of its own autonomy and proclaiming its victims its judges, it outdoes, in its veiled autocracy, all the excess of autonomous art. The culture industry not so much adapts the reactions of its customers as it counterfeits them. It drills them in their attitudes by behaving as if it were itself a customer.

Theodor Adorno (1951)²

The comments of Charles Kegan Paul, the Victorian publisher who was involved in publishing the novels of the nineteenth-century British-Indian author Philip Meadows Taylor as single volume reprints in the 1880s, are illuminating. They are indicative of the publisher's position with regard to publishing—that there was often no correlation between commercial success and the artistic merit of a work. According to Kegan Paul, a substandard or mediocre text would be commercially successful as long it met a perceived want on the part of the public. In effect, the ruminations of the publisher suggests that a firm desirous of acquiring commercial success for a work should be an astute judge of the pre-existing wants of consumers within the market. Yet Theodor Adorno, writing in the mid-twentieth century, offers an entirely distinctive perspective to Kegan Paul's observations, arguing that there is nothing foreordained about consumer demand for certain cultural tropes or productions. They in fact are driven by an industry that preempts and conditions the possible reactions of the consumer. Both Kegan Paul's and Adorno's insights

¹ Charles Kegan Paul, from a lecture entitled "The Production and Life of Books" at the Albert Institute, Windsor, published in the *Fortnightly Review*, vol. 33, no. 196 (April 1, 1883): 487.

² Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, translated by E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 200.

are illuminating when it comes to addressing the key issues explored in this essay. Kegan Paul's comments allude to the ways in which the publisher's promotion of Philip Meadows Taylor's fictional depictions of India and its peoples were to a large extent driven in the mid- to late-nineteenth century by their expectations of what metropolitan readers desired at any given time, whereas Adorno's insights reveal the ways in which British-Indian narratives and the public identity of their authors were not assured in advance, but were, to a large extent, engineered by the publishing industry and the literary marketplace.

Philip Meadows Taylor was the first Briton who lived and worked in India to write a series of novels depicting the subcontinent and its peoples. Taylor was even described as the Walter Scott of India for his romance novels set in the subcontinent.³ He is in some respects the founding figure in the canon of British-Indian literature, with his novels contributing to the fashioning of popular perceptions of India and Indians within the metropole. His work was also disseminated among and read by the Anglo-Indian community and by Indians, in addition to finding readerships in Australia.⁴ His long career in India coincided with major changes in colonial India. These include the British expanding further into North West India, a growing trend to introduce English as a medium of instruction and administration, as well as transfer of the formal power from the East India Company to the Crown to administer the subcontinent in the wake of the 1857 uprisings. Taylor's career also spanned major changes in the British literary marketplace. At the beginning of his career, novels were released in an expensive three-decker form and intended predominantly for circulating libraries, but by the end of his life were increasingly being released in a cheaper single volume affordable to a much wider section of the general public.⁵ Moreover, with rising wages in the 1870s and 1880s and the extension of the railways, travel and leisure options for a wider proportion of the British public increased, and publishers promoted literature to appeal to a new and broader audience.⁶ An examination of the ways in which Taylor's fictional work and his identity was promoted by his

³ David Finkelstein, *Study of the Works of Philip Meadows Taylor* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Edinburgh University, 1990), 17. Taylor's "India" novels were also exported by Kegan Paul in his colonial series to Australia and advertised in various regional Australian newspapers in the late nineteenth century. See *The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser* (New South Wales, Australia), Saturday, 18 August 1888, 2, *South Australian Register* (Adelaide, Australia), Friday, 19 September 1879, 7 and *Warwick Argus* (Queensland, Australia), Thursday, 10 March 1881, 3.

⁴ I use Anglo-Indian in the nineteenth-century sense to denote Britons living in India, rather than in the contemporary sense to denote someone who was mixed race. Priya Joshi, *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture and the English Novel in India* (New York: Columbia University, 2002), 109–11.

⁵ Simon Eliot and Andrew Nash, "Mass Markets: Literature" in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol. 6 1830–1914, edited by David McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2009), 423.

⁶ Edward Royle, *Modern Britain: A Social History* (London: Arnold, 1997), 267–69, 284.

respective publishers thus offers a window into broader issues such as fashioning of British imperial masculinity, as well as intersection of colonial ideology and commodity culture during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Taylor's novels have been widely studied. Scholars such as Patrick Brantlinger and Javed Majeed use Taylor's *Confessions of a Thug* to highlight the shifting relationship between the coloniser and colonised and the justificatory rhetoric that was drawn upon to rule India. Matthew Kaiser, Mary Poovey, and Alex Tickell, on the other hand, engage in a close textual analysis of Taylor's *Confessions* to highlight the contradictory discourses upon which the colonial civilising mission was predicated.⁷ Upamanyu Mukherjee in *Crime and Empire* interrogates Taylor's ambivalent stance in many of his novels towards issues of law and order. More recently, in *Natural Disasters and Victorian Empire*, Mukherjee has focused on Taylor's historical trilogy to examine the ways in which these narratives construct notions of a palliative imperialism and an idealised form of imperial bureaucratic administration. In contrast, Shuchi Kapila and Indrani Sen examine Taylor's novels through a postcolonialist-feminist lens. Kapila and Sen argue that the narrative should be viewed as advocating a specific intervention with regard to reforming the colonised woman Seeta. Furthermore, they argue that the colonised woman functions metonymically as a potentially improvable India that can be reformed and educated with the aid of an enlightened form of patriarchal colonialism.⁸

In his unpublished doctoral thesis, David Finkelstein has provided a detailed account of Taylor's life and writings. He rigorously documents Taylor's correspondence with his two publishers, Bentley and William Blackwood & Sons.⁹ Finkelstein approaches the issue of the varying levels of commercial success for Taylor's literary works by examining the exchange of letters that Bentley and Blackwood's exchanged with their readers, and with the author himself, as well as by situating the author's narrative in relation to the broader changes which occurred in both colonial India and the British literary marketplace during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Whilst Finkelstein's work certainly

⁷ See Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914* (London: Cornell University, 1988), 213–16; Javed Majeed, "Meadows Taylor's *Confessions of a Thug*: the Anglo-Indian Novel as a Genre in the Making" in *Writing India: 1757–1990: The Literature of British India*, edited by Bart Moore-Gilbert (Manchester: Manchester University, 1996), 86–111; Mary Poovey, "Ambiguity and Historicism: Interpreting *Confessions of a Thug*," *Narrative* 12, no. 1 (January 2004): 3–21; Alex Tickell, *Terrorism, Insurgency and Indian-English Literature, 1830–1947* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 32–54; and Matthew Kaiser, "Facing a Mirror: Philip Meadows Taylor's *Confessions of a Thug* and the Politics of Imperial Self-Incrimination" in *Stones of Law, Bricks of Shame: Narrating Imprisonment in the Victorian Age*, edited by Jan Alber and Frank Lauterbach (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2009), 70–88.

⁸ Shuchi Kapila, "Educating Seeta: Philip Meadows Taylor's Romances of Empire," *Victorian Studies* 41, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 211–41; and Indrani Sen, "The 'Loyal Indian Woman' in 'Mutiny Fiction,'" *The Indian Historical Review* 34, no. 2 (2007): 36–57.

⁹ Henceforth, I will refer to William Blackwood and Sons as Blackwood's.

provides a close examination of Taylor's life and work it suffers from too often and too easily accepting the myth of Taylor as an idealised acculturated imperial administrator. Finkelstein describes Taylor as "one of the most remarkable and underrated men to emerge from the British Raj in the nineteenth century," an administrator who was able to stop the inhabitants of Berar—the district Taylor administered during the 1857 uprisings—from rebelling through little more than his "moral strength."¹⁰ Finkelstein, however, neglects to recognise the extent to which Taylor's image was fashioned by the author himself, as well as by various contemporary reviewers and publishers. Furthermore, there is a lack of awareness of the appeal of Taylor's novels as commodities to consumers.

This study examines Taylor's texts as goods which the British publishers and the author promoted in an attempt to cater to specific consumer demands and expectations of India. It will not engage in a close textual analysis of the novels themselves or pursue a biographical approach which foregrounds Taylor's life and works. I am more interested in examining the changing commodity context in which these texts were published and the ways in which the publishers sought to align these narratives and the author's British-Indian identity to meet perceived demands in the British literary marketplace.¹¹ Thus, this essay will examine the ways in which Taylor's publishers in Britain packaged and promoted these narratives.¹²

¹⁰ See Finkelstein, *Study of the Works of Philip Meadows Taylor*, chapters 1 and 6.

¹¹ In this respect my reading is informed by approaches deployed by Simon Frost in his analysis of George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. See Simon Frost, *The Business of the Novel: Economics, Aesthetics and the Case of Middlemarch* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012). The discussion focuses on the advertising and commodity context for Taylor's novels within Britain primarily because Taylor, although certainly aware of an Anglo-Indian audience in India, authored the narratives for British readers. Moreover, publishers promoted this text mainly to Britain, where they considered the bulk of the potential readers would reside. See "Letter from Philip Meadows Taylor to John Blackwood dated May 5 1863" in Finkelstein, *Study of the Works of Philip Meadows Taylor*, 276–77; "Letter from William Blackwood and Sons to Philip Meadows Taylor" in *ibid.*, 274. Bentley's appointed reader also advised the publisher to decline Taylor's *Tara* on the basis it would not attract British readers. See *ibid.*, 20.

¹² The dissemination and reception of Taylor's texts in the Indian subcontinent is a rich topic that is worthy of future discussion that will give it the due attention and space it deserves. That being said, it is notable Taylor's novels were also in demand in India by Indian readers. They were exported to the subcontinent in Kegan Paul's colonial series. Yet, as Priya Joshi points out, the major reason for the failure of Kegan Paul and Co.'s colonial series as a business venture was its inability to recognise the different needs of a specifically Indian market when promoting and exporting British novels to India. Indeed, there are no significant differences between the ways Kegan Paul packaged and marketed Taylor's novels in their standard and colonial series. See Joshi, *In Another Country*, 108–109. This disregard for the differences occurred in spite of the fact that the usage of novels such as Taylor's by Indians was very distinct from metropolitan demand in that Indians were more prone to consume novels that boosted English language skills or resonated with escapist tastes. Taylor was one of the few British novelists in the nineteenth century whose works were translated into various Indian languages, demonstrating the demand for his novels

The discussion will begin by examining the ways that Bentley promoted Taylor's early 'India' works, *Confessions of a Thug* (1839) and *Tippoo Sultaun: A Tale of the Mysore War* (1841), and then contrast this with how Blackwood and Sons marketed *Tara: a Mahratta Tale* (1863) and *Ralph Darnell* (1865). It will then examine how King promoted *Seeta* (1872), which paved the way for King, and later Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., to release reprints of all of Taylor's novels.¹³ By engaging in such a mode of analysis my study will argue that the publisher's ability to align the text to the specific commodity context of the day, by supplying suitable advertisements and paratexts, was crucial to representations of India gaining a significant readership. My definition of advertisements is broad: I include advertisements which Taylor's respective publishers placed for his novels in newspapers and magazines that featured alongside advertisements promoting other commodities, services and social events of the day, but also the prefaces and frontispiece illustrations which encouraged readers to purchase the novels. Whilst acknowledging the primary aim of Taylor's publishers was to sell the author's work, rather than to shape representations of India, I argue that paratextual materials, especially the accompanying frontispiece illustrations of Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.'s later editions of Taylor's novels framed the possible ways in which these texts could be interpreted.¹⁴ Drawing on a Baudrillardian mode of analysis, I propose that advertisements for Taylor's novels were cultural discourses in their own right, given that their messages were relayed to consumers even if they decided not to read the actual novels, and are thus worthy of analysis in and of themselves.¹⁵ I view them as signs capable of generating a series of other

within the subcontinent. For more on the reception and dissemination of British novels in India, see *ibid.*, 82–90 and 109–11. It is also worth noting that a few of Taylor's novels in abridged forms were used by British colonial educational institutions in India as suitable literature for instructing Indians in English reading skills. Chapters were divided into sections to make it easier for Indian students who were not fully conversant in English. Moreover, supplementary material at the end of the narrative explained Indian history and Indian terms to enable English teachers to teach this text in class. See Philip Meadows Taylor, *Tara: a Mahratta Tale* [abridged by Henry Martyn, MA and annotated by U. S. Armour for The Indian Students' Library] (Bombay: Longman, Green and Co., 1921); Philip Meadows Taylor, *Tippu Sultan* [abridged and annotated by Henry Martyn, M.A. for The Indian Students' Library] (London: Longman, Green and Co. London, 1919); and Philip Meadows Taylor, *Confessions of a Thug* [abridged and annotated by Theodore Douglas Dunn for The Indian Students' Library] (Bombay: Longman, Green and Co., 1921).

¹³ I am not including Taylor's final novel, *A Noble Queen* (1878), in this discussion mainly because the narrative was released posthumously and thus was not promoted during Taylor's lifetime.

¹⁴ In this respect my methodology is informed by Gerard Genette's notion of paratexts as "a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that—whether well or poorly understood and achieved—is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it." See Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, translated by Jane Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.

¹⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, translated by James Benedict (London: Verso, 2005), 178.

signs concerning the British colonial endeavour which in some ways functioned independently of the narratives they promoted.¹⁶ Their importance lies in the fact they reached a much broader audience than readers of Taylor's novels and arguably exerted a greater influence than the texts themselves. Moreover, I pay particular attention to the excerpts from the novels that reviewers culled for their respective advertisements. Through examining this material, I propose that reviews framed the author's Indian career for the reading public and were sites where the respective publishers, and the publishing industry more generally, drew attention to representations of India that they thought would appeal to literary audiences. Reviews of the period were especially influential because publishers of the period were often instrumental in planting favourable reviews in publications with which they were already affiliated, and in some cases even had their staff write these reviews. Furthermore, I argue that the publishers who were successful in promoting Taylor's novels through canny advertising actually manufactured consumer demand for certain tropes of India, rather than merely catering to pre-existing ones. This essay, in effect, deploys the advertisements for Taylor's novels as case studies to highlight the ways in which a commercialising metropolitan publishing market and its expectations of consumer demands generated long-lasting tropes concerning India, its customs, and its peoples, as well as framed the way that British-Indian imperial masculinity was represented. Let me begin, however, by discussing the commodity context within which Philip Meadows Taylor's first two novels appeared.

The Bentley Period: *Confessions of a Thug* and *Tippoo Sultaun*

The subject of *Thagi* had definite mileage in British newspapers and periodicals in the 1830s. *Thagi*, the phenomenon of gangs robbing and strangling to death travellers by the roadside, had been reported by Company administrators for more than half a century. By the late 1830s, the portrayal of thugs as disorganised bandits who engaged in murder and theft for primarily economic motives had transformed into the image of members of a nation-wide organised cult who committed crimes because they believed they were propitiating the Hindu goddess Kali.¹⁷ It was Colonel William Sleeman who advertised himself as the discoverer of *Thagi* and who alleged that it was a cult that had spread across India. Sleeman published the *Ramaseeana* in the *Calcutta Review* in 1837, which provided transcripts of detailed interviews with Thugs, genealogical lists of Thug families, and a dictionary of the vocabulary of the secret language that was

¹⁶ Ibid., 178–80, and Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, translated by Chris Turner (London: Sage, 1998), 125.

¹⁷ Kim Wagner, "The Deconstructed Strangers: A Reassessment of Thuggee," *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no. 4 (October 2004): 957.

supposedly particular to the fraternity.¹⁸ As Javed Majeed has already stated, the increased reportage of *Thagi* and the perception that it was seen as a nation-wide phenomenon was crucial to the “state’s conception of its role in its territories” and its “recent sense of paramountcy.”¹⁹ In this context *Thagi* is presented as a nation-wide criminal cult so pervasive that only the Company has the power to root it out. It consequently becomes discursively useful to the Company in terms of justifying its presence in India and further intervention within Indian society. Anti-*Thagi* legislation was a convenient means to police and survey wandering groups, such as mendicants, tribes and *Faqirs*, who had aroused the Company’s suspicion because their mobility often evaded the colonial gaze. It could further be used to justify interfering in areas where Thugs were alleged to operate that were outside of the Company’s established territories.²⁰

Notwithstanding the Company’s interest in the issue of *Thagi*, it was a topic that also captured the popular imagination within Britain. The *Edinburgh Review* subsequently reviewed *Confessions*, quoting extensively from Sleeman’s *Ramaseeana*. In turn, the *Edinburgh Review*’s article on *Thagi* was again referred to by various newspapers and periodicals in Britain. *The Morning Chronicle* commented on the secret “profession” called “Thuggee” whose adherents traveled along roads disguised as either traders, religious pilgrims, or sepoys and insinuated themselves with other travellers only to steal their possessions and strangle them to death in gruesome fashion. Several articles made comparisons to the Spanish inquisition or ghoulish examples of criminality in Europe such as Burke and Hare, thereby placing *Thagi* within a familiar framework. The Indian criminal cult was, however, presented as more appalling than any of these European crimes, as it was apparently sanctioned by indigenous religious conviction.²¹ Thus, according to these articles, whereas European criminals suffered guilt over their heinous crimes, this was not the case for Thugs who believed they were engaged in an act of religious devotion. According to the news reports *Thagi* was a crime that had existed since time immemorial under both Hindu and Muslim Kingdoms, but that was now on the verge of being eradicated by the Company. Many of the articles repeated the very same excerpt of the *Ramaseeana* as the *Edinburgh Review*, where a party of armed soldiers belonging to an indigenous ruler is befriended by a band of thugs that subsequently attacks and brutally slays them.

This scene extracted from the novel goes on to describe the aftermath of the slaying: the Thugs spare a son of a slain soldier so that one of the bandits can adopt the boy. It is interesting that this specific scene is picked up in various

¹⁸ Tickell, *Terrorism and Insurgency*, 32.

¹⁹ Javed Majeed, “Meadows Taylor’s *Confessions of a Thug*,” 86.

²⁰ Tickell, *Terrorism and Insurgency*, 34.

²¹ *The Standard* (London, England) Monday, August 12, 1839. Hereafter all newspaper references with no place of publication listed are London publications.

contemporary newspaper articles.²² What it serves to emphasise is the inability of indigenous kingdoms to maintain law and order. The agents of indigenous law and order are in effect powerless and easy prey for Indian criminality. Moreover, there is a self-perpetuating and corrupting quality about the adoption of the child of one of the murdered men, who will presumably himself be raised to become a Thug. The popular interest in *Thagi* coincided with increased policing in Britain, and debates surrounding this phenomenon. It further needs to be seen in the context of the demand in the literary marketplace during this period for Newgate criminal fiction which explored ghoulish criminal transgression, yet on occasion valorised on some level the criminal as a romantic outlaw who evaded the police and surveillance of the state.²³ It is notable that the idea for a romance novel depicting *Thagi* did not originate from Taylor's mind. It was rather Edward Bulwer Lytton who suggested the topic after reading an article that Taylor had submitted in 1833 for the *New Monthly Magazine* which Lytton edited.²⁴ Lytton, who had a proven track record in producing commercially successful Newgate criminal fiction and romance novels, clearly thought there was a gap in the market for a romance novel about this exotic criminal cult alleged to exist in India.

The novel was cannily promoted by Taylor's publisher. Richard Bentley had well-established marketing strategies for promoting novels that he had inherited from his former mentor and director, Henry Colburn. The publisher directed his staff to compose reviews for novels in periodicals and newspapers in which he had a commercial interest. The advertisements for his novels would then quote selected parts of favourable reviews or puffs which his own staff had authored. The habit of newspapers copying each other in the early-nineteenth century ensured that Bentley's advertisements reached a broader audience than merely readers of publications in which the publisher had a financial investment. Excerpts of reviews were then quoted in various advertisements for the novel.²⁵ It is revealing to examine the ways in which *Confessions of a Thug* was advertised as a text. According to the *Sunday Times* review: "These Confessions though in the form of a story, carry with them the full impress of their authenticity. The work must excite great interest." An *Atlas* review quoted in an advertisement states: "The admirers of Romance will have a treat in this work, such as they have not had for years. Its

²² This same episode from Sleeman's *Ramaseeana* was quoted at length in the following newspapers and periodicals: *The Morning Chronicle*, Thursday, January 26, 1837; *The Examiner*, Sunday, January 29, 1837; *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin, Ireland) February 1, 1837; and *The Newcastle Courant* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England) Friday, February 17, 1837.

²³ Upamanyu Mukherjee, *Crime and Empire: The Colony in Nineteenth-Century Fictions of Crime* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003), 46–95.

²⁴ Finkelstein, *Study of the Works of Philip Meadows Taylor*, 14.

²⁵ Royal Gettman, *A Victorian Publisher: A Study of the Bentley Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 20 and 67–68.

truth and reality give it an interest such as no mere fiction can excite.”²⁶ A *Courier* review quoted in *The Standard* also comments:

One would suppose that the exciting and terrible adventures recorded in this work, were the pure offspring of fiction and romance, but nevertheless they are, in fact, the real confessions of one who took a leading part in those horrible scenes which disgraced India for so many hundreds of years. Captain Taylor gives a very characteristic picture of the general habits of the natives of India, and he describes the country in graphic and forcible style, thus giving to the awful characteristics of the subject an air of authenticity as well as domestic interest. In addition to the very strong emotion which a perusal of the work is calculated to excite, pleasurable feelings will be derived from the admirable description of very romantic and comparatively little known regions and the peculiarity of their inhabitants....²⁷

These advertisements, which quote from reviews in all probability penned by Bentley's own staff, emphasise the “authenticity” and “truth” of this text, while stressing its transgressive aspects such as the capacity to provoke “horror” and “excite” readers. The word “romance” appears frequently in these puffs. Moreover, the *Courier* review emphasises the capacity of the text to provide geographical information and knowledge about India and its inhabitants. In addition, there is a viral and mimetic quality to these advertisements that enables the same review to proliferate across different publications.²⁸ The reviews and puffs are, moreover, aimed at drilling and instilling in potential readers certain transgressive desires which this narrative can supposedly fulfil. These periodical notices thus exemplify Theodor Adorno's views that the culture industry tends to generate specific desires in its consumers which they can conveniently satisfy. Yet the supposed authenticity and journalistic quality of the narrative that these advertisements draw attention to sanction such prurient interests. The advertisement functions through what Adorno describes as the tendency of the culture industry to effect a “fundamental readjustment” in the attitudes of consumers who, while believing that their individualistic desires are satiated, are reconciled to the prevailing ideology of the day. Its efficacy relies on something that producers and disseminators of popular culture are dependent upon; the tendency of “people” to aspire “more to adapt to others and to the whole” than in developing their tastes completely autonomously.²⁹ Thus Adorno's analysis helps explain how the promotional materials are intended to reassure readers that their potential interest in the

²⁶ *Atlas* review quoted in an advertisement in *John Bull*, Monday, October 21, 1839, 494.

²⁷ A *Courier* review extracted and cited in *The Standard* Wednesday, January 22, 1840, 1.

²⁸ The same advertisement for *Confessions* which was quoted in the *Atlas* and *The Morning Herald* reviews appears, for example, in the following publications: *The Morning Chronicle*, Saturday, August 31, 1839; *The Morning Post*, Wednesday, August 31, 1839; and *The Standard*, Monday, September 2, 1839, 1.

²⁹ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 200–201.

text is socially and morally acceptable, as the narrative will provide them with information about India, a region in which Britons have a “domestic interest.” Readers’ desires are thus aligned with prevailing colonial ideologies of the period.

The Confessions of a Thug’s success in meeting the demands of the British literary marketplace, or rather fulfilling the desires instilled by the publisher into readers in advance of them reading the text, is testified by the fact that upon its release it ran through two editions in just four months.³⁰ In the immediate aftermath of the novel’s release, and while on leave in England, Richard Bentley strongly encouraged Taylor to pen a historical romance concerning Tipu Sultan, despite Taylor’s reservations about his ability to write upon the subject on the basis that he had only spent a short time travelling through Mysore and was not totally confident about the geography or the history of the region.³¹ That Bentley directed Taylor towards the subject of his next novel was by no means untypical, as he suggested topics for various authors during this period.³² Bentley clearly thought that there was a gap in the market for a historical romance concerning Tipu Sultan, the Mysore military leader who had previously presented an obstacle to the Company’s expansion in India. That Taylor was initially reluctant to write a novel upon a region and topic about which he had little prior knowledge, but was nevertheless persuaded to do so, demonstrates how responsive this British-Indian author was in adapting his fiction to satisfy his publisher and his expectations of perceived market demands. On one immediate level, Taylor’s novel was intended to be a sequel to Walter Scott’s historical romance, *The Surgeon’s Daughter* (1831), also published by Bentley. In Scott’s novel, Tipu Sultan features peripherally as a lascivious oriental who attempts to kidnap an English lady. Taylor, with his experience of living in the subcontinent, was entrusted with providing an engagement with the subcontinent and the Mysore military leader deeper than that of Scott’s novel. On another level, though, the novel capitalised on a surfeit of coverage of the Company’s military campaigns in Mysore, as well as the general demonisation within the metropole, of Tipu Sultan as an oriental monster.

The subject of Tipu Sultan would have resonated in the early-nineteenth century with the British metropolitan public. The Mysore military leader had repeatedly thwarted the British East India Company’s expansion in the late-eighteenth century, so the Company’s successful campaigns in the Third Anglo-Mysore War (1789–1792) and the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War (1799), and Tipu Sultan’s death, were very well reported in the British press (1799).³³ There was,

³⁰ Finkelstein, *Study of the Works of Philip Meadows Taylor*, 16.

³¹ Philip Meadows Taylor, *The Story of My Life*, ed. by Henry Bruce (London: Forgotten Books, 2012), 125.

³² Gettman, *A Victorian Publisher*, 156.

³³ P. J. Marshall, “‘Cornwallis Triumphant’: War in India and the British Public in the Late Eighteenth Century,” in *War, Strategy and International Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century*, edited

furthermore, a series of visual representations depicting Tipu Sultan's final defeat and stage reenactments in metropolitan theatres of the storming of Seringapatam.³⁴ In addition to celebrating the military victories in Mysore, there was a plethora of printed material that portrayed Tipu Sultan as a sadistic oriental despot. In the last decade of the eighteenth century and in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, captivity narratives authored by British officers and soldiers imprisoned in Mysore by Tipu's forces were in vogue. In these narratives, former captives recorded their experiences of imprisonment, documenting harsh conditions in cells, long exposure to the sun, assaults and humiliation at the hands of Indian guards and in some cases coerced circumcisions.³⁵ As Linda Colley has argued, British captivity narratives and representations of Britons oppressed by Indians were discursively useful because they could be employed to depict the innate savagery of Indian rulers and thus were a convenient means to justify military campaigns against indigenous kingdoms. The trope of white British officers imprisoned and emasculated by Indian captors proved popular and struck fear into the British imagination as it was an inversion of "normative" colonial power relations.³⁶ Such narratives conveyed an underlying anxiety that Britons might one day be subservient to "Orientals" if the East India Company were not suitably assertive. Representations of the cruelty of an Indian ruler or Indian captors could be used to garner popular indignation that could lead in turn to support for the Company's expansionist agenda within India.

The immediate reviews for *Tippoo Sultaun* emphasised its account of the career and death of Tipu Sultan at the hands of the British. For instance, *The Morning Post* quoted a review by *The Sun* which stated that Taylor's "narrative" had "undertaken to delineate the fortunes of the famous Tippoo Saib" and the traced "eventful career of the soldier king ... even down to the moment of his defeat

by Laurence Freedman, Paul Hayes, and Robert O'Neill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 59.

³⁴ The image of Lord Cornwallis as the kindly patriarch taking Tipu's sons as hostages had made its way onto tea trays, glass paintings, and medallions in British homes. See Hermione de Almeida and George M. Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (London: Ashgate, 2005), 151 and Ashok Malhotra, *Making British Indian Fictions, 1772–1823* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 98.

³⁵ Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600–1850* (London: Pimlico, 2002), 282–86. Moreover, Tipu Sultan's toy tiger was brought back to Britain, where it was stored in the foyer of the East India House and displayed free of charge to the British public. This life-sized model tiger straddling an English officer featured a handle connected to pipes and a keyboard. When the handle was turned it caused the man's arms to move to the mimicked growls of the tiger and the squeals of agony of the victim. The Company exhibited it in the East India House for the purposes of shocking British onlookers at the cruelty of this Indian indigenous ruler. See Almeida and Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, 35–38.

³⁶ Kate Teltscher, "The Fearful Name of the Black Hole': Fashioning an Imperial Myth," in *Writing India: 1757–1990*, edited by Bart-Moore Gilbert (Manchester: Manchester University, 1996), 30–49.

and death, with great minuteness and accuracy.”³⁷ In addition, *The Standard*’s advertisement incorporates a review by *The Atlas* which emphasises the novel’s depiction of Tipu Sultan “that well known chief” and “magnificent warrior” who was “killed in the defence of Seringapatam, with which striking incident even the narrative closes.”³⁸ Several reviews also emphasise the primary relevance of the text’s depiction of Tipu as an oriental monster. According to *The Spectator*, Taylor accurately depicts Tipu’s “quick and subtle intellect, his egregious vanity, his Mahomedan bigotry, commingled with all kinds of superstition, and his weakness of judgement.”³⁹ By contrast, a review in *The Era* states that “Taylor’s present subject — the Lion of Mysore — is replete with terrible interest.”⁴⁰ Clearly the advertisements sought to capitalise on, as well as contribute to, consumer demand for a detailed character profile of a supposed oriental villain. The excerpts that were presented in the longer reviews of the day recounted the storming of Seringapatam and the slaying of Tipu, as well as a depiction of white Britons held captive by the Mysore military leader.⁴¹

Contemporary metropolitan reviews of *Tippoo Sultaun* made favourable comments upon the generalised depiction of the orient rather than summarising the specific plot. For instance, *The Times* reviewer wrote: “The rich coloring of Oriental life, the varied manners of the mixed population of India, joined to a very striking power of local description, give a charm to this tale.”⁴² Moreover, the *Morning Herald* situated the text in relation to other oriental texts such as “Haji Baba” or the “Kazzibash.” The reviews comment on the authenticity of the narratives and the closeness of Taylor to the scenes he depicts. For instance, *The Sun* notes that the author had “resided several years in India” and “visited many of the most celebrated cities and most picturesque landscapes” ensuring he could use “his opportunities of close observation to the best account.”⁴³ It further emphasised the visual aspects of the narrative, using words and phrases such as “oriental scenery,” “picturesque landscapes,” “colouring,” and “graphic.”⁴⁴ The review comments that Tipu Sultan’s character is well drawn by Taylor.⁴⁵

³⁷ See *The Morning Post*, Monday, January 25, 1841, 8.

³⁸ See *The Standard*, Tuesday, January 26, 1841. Similarly, another *Morning Post* edition quotes a review by *The Spectator* which states that “The chief historical personage in this romance is Tippoo himself, who is drawn with great discrimination, and, we doubt not, with more accuracy than in common histories.” See *The Morning Post*, Wednesday, January 20, 1841, 8. A *Morning Herald* review quoted in *The Morning Post* states “The great Sultaun—Soldier and Tyrant—occupies the chief place in the picture which is presented to us.” See *The Morning Post*, Tuesday, March 2, 1841, 7.

³⁹ *The Morning Post*, Wednesday, January 20, 1841, 8.

⁴⁰ *The Era*, Sunday January 24, 1841.

⁴¹ See *ibid.*, and *Sherborne Mercury* (Dorset, England) Monday, January 18, 1841, 4.

⁴² *London Standard*, Tuesday, May 18, 1841 quoting *The Times*.

⁴³ *Sun* review quoted in *The Morning Post*, Monday, January 25, 1841, 8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

These advertisements intended to encourage consumers to read the text as they might a landscape painting or a verbal picture of the orient, while emphasising the particular portrait of the Mysore military leader. Moreover, the promotional puffs seem to guide readers towards situating the novel in the tradition of *Arabian Nights* oriental tales.

The advertisement in the *Morning Post* references other products of a similar nature to *Tippoo Sultaun*, yet at the same time aims to convey to readers that this particular good is superior to those “others” on the basis of its supposed authenticity.⁴⁶ It does so by drawing attention to the fact that the novel’s author has lived and worked in India, and is thus eminently qualified to flesh out a representation of this particular region of the orient. In this respect the promotional claims disregard the author’s own anxieties that he was not qualified to author the narrative due to the fact he had only spent a limited time in Mysore. Yet the advertisement’s function, to draw attention to the supposed acculturated nature of the novel, was important since the majority of its readers would be Britons who had never been to India. It seems reasonable to assume that those readers would expect to gain some knowledge of India and the colonial context.⁴⁷ Such knowledge of the subcontinent and British colonial expansion within the region could have provided cultural capital, as indeed any topical subject might have, and be used by consumers in conversation among their friends, family, and colleagues to enhance their social status within what the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu would term as their “habitus.”⁴⁸ In this respect, Taylor’s experience of living and working in India was a commercial asset that added commodity value to his literary works in that it granted a level of “authenticity” to the narratives. When promoting *Confessions* and *Tippoo Sultaun*, Bentley was eager to emphasise Taylor’s lived experience in India in order to convey to readers that the novels offered more accurate depictions of India than those authored by Britons who had never been to the subcontinent. The publisher was also keen to draw attention to the fact that Taylor worked in the indirectly controlled princely state of Hyderabad for the Nizam, a location that conferred on him a romantic outsider status that he might not have had if he had been a commissioned officer for the Company.⁴⁹

The undue prominence of Tipu Sultan in the advertisement and review is clear from their much less frequent mention of the main characters: Herbert Compton,

⁴⁶ *Morning Herald* review quoted in *The Morning Post*, Monday, January 25, 1841, 8.

⁴⁷ Although, of course, a significant proportion of British people who had been to India or lived in India also read Taylor’s narratives. However, they did not constitute the significant proportion of the consumers that the author and the publisher wished to target.

⁴⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice (London, 1984), 169–75.

⁴⁹ In Bentley’s advertisements for Taylor’s novels, Taylor is referred to by his military title as “Captain MEADOWS TAYLOR of the service of the Nizam.” See *The Morning Post*, Monday, 28 December, 1840, 1, and *The Standard*, Tuesday, December 29, 1840, 1.

Kasim, Ameena, and Abdul Rhyman Khan.⁵⁰ Little attention is paid to the love triangle between Kasim, Ameena, and Abdul Rhyman Khan, or to Taylor's depiction of Abdul Rhyman Khan's household and his polygamous marriages. Even though a significant part of the narrative is set in England, the reviews and advertisements never refer to those aspects of the novel. Moreover, the narrative thread concerning Herbert Compton's own story of the Mysore military campaigns and his experience of captivity is excluded. Clearly, the selling points of the narrative for the publisher were the rise and demise of Tipu Sultan, the temporary inversion of power relations, and the generalised depiction of the orient, as well as the supposed authenticity guaranteed by an author who had lived in India.

Tippoo Sultaun's strong initial sales could be attributed to a number of factors. The novel benefitted from the recent success and topicality of *Confessions*. Bentley capitalised upon the fact that Philip Meadows Taylor was a hot name in the literary marketplace with the reviews and advertisements for *Tippoo Sultaun* all mentioning that Taylor was the author of *Confessions*. In addition, the narrative tapped into the pre-existing metropolitan interest in the Mysore leader and captivity narratives, while at the same time resembling a travelogue which echoed aspects of the *Arabian Nights*. As the campaigns against Tipu Sultan were well reported in the British press and depicted in various popular metropolitan entertainment forms, consumers had some background knowledge to enable them to interpret and engage with this narrative. Further to these aspects to the text, *Tippoo Sultaun* preserved the racial and cultural hierarchies to which the majority of its metropolitan readership would subscribe. The relative cultural inferiority of India and its inhabitants is conveyed through Taylor's depiction of Indian Islamic customs such as polygamy, as well as through his documentation of the various superstitions of the "natives." The narrative, in addition, has its Indian hero, Kasim, ultimately subordinating himself to the British and acknowledging the supposed moral superiority of white Britons.

Whilst *Tippoo Sultaun* had respectable sales figures for the first few years, it did not have the long-lasting appeal of *Confessions of a Thug*, which sold over 5000 copies when it was reissued by Kegan Paul & Co. between 1887 and 1897.⁵¹ Whilst in the advertisements and paratextual materials for Meadows Taylor's later novels, the author's first novel, *Confessions of a Thug* is still mentioned as a selling point, this is not the case for *Tippoo Sultaun*. In fact, in a review of Taylor's next novel, *Tara*, the reviewer seemed unaware of the existence of *Tippoo Sultaun* and claimed that *Tara* was Taylor's second novel.⁵² There are several possible reasons

⁵⁰ In fact, of the contemporary reviews I examined, only *The Times* review, cited in the advertisement placed in *The Standard*, mentions the two main characters of the narrative, Kasim Ali and Herbert Compton. See *The Standard*, Tuesday, January 12, 1841, 1.

⁵¹ Finkelstein, *Study of the Works of Philip Meadows Taylor*, 16.

⁵² *John Bull*, Saturday, October 24, 1863, 683.

that account for the novel's lack of long lasting appeal. One possible explanation is that metropolitan interest in Tipu Sultan as an oriental monster was displaced in the wake of the Indian uprisings of 1857, when other Indian leaders, such as Nana Sahib, were demonised. After 1857, British readers had more powerful versions of inverted power relations to fall back on, given the sensationalist accounts of the Kanpur massacre in which white women and children were supposedly butchered by Indian sepoys.⁵³ Furthermore, *Confessions of a Thug*, with its ghoulish depiction of murder, bloodletting, and moral transgression, overlapped with the tropes of the later sensational novel that dominated the metropolitan literary market in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The text's interest in policing criminal India also overlapped with the later agendas of the British Raj and its concern for monitoring the so-called criminal tribes in the Criminal Tribes Acts of 1871 and 1896 which were enacted in the wake of the Indian Uprisings of 1857.⁵⁴ *Confessions* was thus a text that endured because it aligned with the changing commodity context of the metropolitan literary marketplace and the later concerns of the British Raj. *Tippoo Sultaun* failed to endure to the same extent because of the short-lived topicality of Tipu Sultan and captivity narratives.

Taylor's Historical Trilogy

Taylor's trilogy of historical romance novels *Tara: A Mahratta Tale* (1863), *Ralph Darnell* (1865) and *Seeta* (1872) were, with the exception of *Tara*, authored after his retirement from service in India and his return to Britain.⁵⁵ Each novel of the trilogy is set amid a key event in Indian history: the Marathas breaking away from Mughal dominion in 1657; the Battle of Plassey in 1757, which saw the East India Company gaining Bengal; and the Indian mutiny of 1857, which subsequently resulted in the administration of India being formally handed over from the Company to the British Crown. Indian history succumbs to some uncanny fatalistic logic within this trilogy, with India destined to be ruled by the British.⁵⁶ Yet what concerns me here is the commercial context in which these narratives were released and how their respective publishers promoted these texts.

Tara, the first novel in the trilogy, is set against the backdrop of the Maratha ruler Sivaji's rise to power and the gradual disintegration and fragmentation of Mughal power in India. It is a historical romance about an interfaith romance

⁵³ Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, 199–226.

⁵⁴ Badri Narayan Tiwari, "Identity and Narratives: Dalits and Memories of 1857" in *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, vol. 5 *Muslim, Dalit and Subaltern Narratives*, edited by Crispin Bates (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2014), 14.

⁵⁵ Meadows Taylor began writing *Tara* before his retirement and his return to England, although it was eventually completed after his return to Britain.

⁵⁶ "Letter from Philip Meadows Taylor to William Blackwood and Sons dated 26th March 1863" in Finkelstein, *The Study of the Works of Philip Meadows Taylor*, 273–74.

between a Hindu Brahmin girl, Tara, and a noble fair-skinned Muslim, Fazil Khan. There are no white European characters in the novel and the events precede any significant British presence within the subcontinent. Unlike *Confessions of a Thug* or *Tippoo Sultaun*, the subject matter and the historical backdrop for this narrative had not been suggested by a publisher or a popular author with a significant track record of meeting the demands of the British literary marketplace. It was Taylor himself who conceived of the topic.⁵⁷

The author had difficulties securing a favourable deal for *Tara*. Bentley, on the basis of Taylor's previous success, made an offer for the novel, but Taylor was dissatisfied with the terms and eventually turned to Blackwood's. Blackwood's was also initially hesitant: when informed by the author that the novel had no "European element" and "belongs to the people of India," Blackwood's initially responded by expressing similar doubts about the commercial viability of the text.⁵⁸ They clearly felt that the unfamiliar Indian elements and lack of identifiable European elements, such as European characters or landscapes, would be too intimidating for most readers and would limit the novel's commercial viability. After twenty years, Taylor's name also no longer had the same currency in the literary marketplace and could not be capitalised upon to the same extent.

Blackwood's anxieties that *Tara* would not be commercially successful proved to be well grounded: the novel obtained only very modest initial sales in Britain. Indeed, while most reviewers were at least complimentary, one reviewer in *The Times* was heavily critical:

We have little sympathy with the feelings of Orientals in our own day to be touched with the sorrows and rejoicings of their remote ancestors, and the writer who seeks to move us with a work of fiction is mistaken if he looks for any great success in this direction. He had better choose his subject from his own country and his own time if he cares that his work should be very popular.⁵⁹

The reviewer's opinion that a novel that depicted "orientals" from the distant past was never likely to be popular aligned with Bentley and Blackwood's forebodings. Another explanation for why this particular novel did not fare commercially well could be that it was released within a decade of the uprisings of 1857, at a time when the British press and literary marketplace had been flooded with the atrocities that Indian soldiers had supposedly committed on white women and children at Kanpur. In such a commodity context where Indians were being vilified and sensationalist horror stories were circulating, a novel relatively sympathetic to Indian inhabitants and cultures was unlikely to prove popular.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 17–18.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁹ *The Times*, Thursday, November 5, 1863, 12.

Ralph Darnell, Taylor's second part of the trilogy, was better calculated to cater to what he perceived to be the tastes of the reading public. The narrative starts in England on a landed estate in the Northumbrian countryside, then moves to the capital, and only later to Bengal, and then returns to England in the denouement. The plot concerns a young man from an aristocratic landed family who discovers that he is a bastard and has to redeem himself after being involved in some ill-advised criminal escapade. He does so through distinguished military service in the colonies. In this respect, the novel is similar to British family saga novels produced by Thackeray and Trollope, sagas which often hinged on whether one of the leading protagonists was legitimate. The foundational events of the rise of British colonial power that are portrayed in the subcontinent would have been familiar to a wide section of the metropolitan public who were somewhat acquainted with British colonial history. It refers to John Holwell's sensationalistic and popular Black Hole of Calcutta account, which told of East India Company officers and other Britons who were imprisoned by Siraj ud-Daulah in an underground dungeon, many of them reportedly dying of suffocation by the following morning. It also portrays Robert Clive's victory at the Battle of Plassey. Yet despite incorporating these well known episodes, the novel was a commercial failure; within a year of its release it had not even generated enough funds to cover the publisher's expenditure on the printing and paper required to meet its limited print run.⁶⁰

David Finkelstein suggests a number of reasons why *Ralph Darnell's* commercial failed. The novel did not effectively capitalise on the author's selling points; Taylor after all occupied a niche in the British literary marketplace. He was a British-Indian author who, due to the fact that he had lived and worked in colonial India, was seen as an authority when it came to documenting the habits, customs, and cultures of the Indian people, as well as the distinctive landscapes of the subcontinent. Yet the novel does not depict India until the second volume, too late for a metropolitan readership who primarily read Taylor's work to gain information about India. By penning a sentimental aristocratic family saga story set for a large part in Britain, Taylor strayed into a very competitive marketplace where he had to compete with very well established British metropolitan authors. Furthermore, Finkelstein argues, *Ralph Darnell* is simply not as well written.⁶¹ I, however, take issue with Finkelstein's suggestion that the inferior literary quality contributed to its commercial failure. There are good grounds to suggest, as Upamanyu Mukherjee has proposed, that this is Taylor's "most structurally accomplished work as the micro-history of the hero [Ralph Darnell] is intricately woven into the larger history of the rise to British power in India."

⁶⁰ "Letter from John Blackwood to Philip Meadows Taylor dated September 20 1866" in Finkelstein, *Study of the Works of Philip Meadows Taylor*, 334–35. By the end of 1866 only 264 copies of *Ralph Darnell* had been sold. See *ibid.*, 24.

⁶¹ Finkelstein, *Study of the Works of Philip Meadows Taylor*, 23–24.

Indeed, as Mukherjee correctly argues, the novel lends itself to a sophisticated critique of the colonial civilising mission by showing “the colony for what it often was, a receptacle of British refuse.”⁶²

Rather than attributing the failure of *Tara* and *Ralph Darnell* to the author’s inability to produce works in line with the prevailing commodity context, I would argue a larger responsibility for the commercial failure can be assigned to the publisher in not successfully promoting and packaging the texts. Blackwood’s did not undertake the same efforts in marketing *Tara* and *Ralph Darnell* as Bentley had for the author’s previous two novels. Whereas advertisements quoting favourable reviews can be found in a broad range of newspapers and magazines for *Confessions of a Thug* and *Tippoo Sultaun*, far fewer survive for the first two parts of Taylor’s trilogy. From the correspondence between Taylor and Blackwood’s, it seems it was the author who was chasing up his existing contacts in the literary world to ensure positive reviews for his works, rather than relying on the publisher.⁶³ Blackwood’s reach did not seem to extend as far as Bentley’s in terms of planting favourable reviews of both narratives, given there were a few negative or mixed reviews that slipped through into the press for *Tara* and *Ralph Darnell*.⁶⁴ Moreover, Blackwood’s advertisements did not draw attention to Taylor’s image as a romantic outsider by stating that he worked for the Nizam of Hyderabad.⁶⁵ Rather than placing reviews that emphasised the transgressive and prurient nature of the narratives, as Bentley did for *Confessions* and *Tippoo Sultaun*, Blackwood’s advertisements gathered reviews that referred to the narratives as “charming” stories or “remarkable.”⁶⁶ These rather vague adjectives lacked the capacity to incite desires in potential consumers.

Suitable advertisements and reviews enabled widespread commercial sale because they provided consumers with the potential benefits and desires that could be met from purchasing this product. They also framed the ways in which narratives could be read. The fact that Blackwood’s did not sufficiently provide

⁶² Mukherjee, *Crime and Empire*, 148–49. My insertion in the quotation.

⁶³ Taylor in his correspondence demonstrates that he had secured a commitment from his friend Henry Reeve to author a positive review in the *Edinburgh Review* for *Tara* and requests that Blackwood’s delay the release of *Tara* until after the review comes out. See “Letters from Philip Meadows Taylor to John Blackwood dated August 8 1863 and September 14 1863” in Finkelstein, *Study of the Works of Philip Meadows Taylor*, 293, 296.

⁶⁴ There were a few critical or mixed reviews of *Tara* in *The Athenaeum* and *The Saturday Review*. See Finkelstein, *The Study of the Works of Philip Meadows Taylor*, 110–11. For critical reviews of *Ralph Darnell*, see *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Tuesday, January 9, 1866, and *The Morning Post*, Saturday, December 30, 1865, 3.

⁶⁵ Blackwood’s advertisements for *Tara* and *Ralph Darnell* did not refer to the fact that Taylor worked in the Princely State of Hyderabad and mainly referred to the author as Captain Meadows Taylor. See *John Bull*, Saturday, October 17, 1863, 657, and *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Friday, November 10, 1865.

⁶⁶ For typical examples of Blackwood’s advertisements for *Tara* and *Ralph Darnell*, see *The Standard*, Friday, November 10, 1865 and *The Examiner*, Saturday, November 11, 1865.

these meant, of course, that readers were less predisposed to reading the text. The publisher had failed to learn an important lesson from Bentley — that a desire for Indian fictions could be manufactured and incited.

In addition to not taking active efforts to market Taylor's novels appropriately, as Finkelstein has correctly pointed out, the format in which Blackwood's produced the novel was unsuitable. Blackwood's released both *Tara* and *Ralph Darnell* in a three-decker format, despite Taylor's wish that they both be published in serialised format in *Blackwood's Magazine*. Blackwood's was resistant to publishing his works in the magazine on the grounds that his work was not of broad enough interest for a general market.⁶⁷ Whilst Blackwood's may have been justified in this opinion, they could have brought out the works in a cheaper single volume. The difficulty with three-deckers was that by the 1860s they were becoming outdated. Priced at thirty-one shillings, the novels were beyond what most individual readers were willing to pay for a novel. They were in fact designed for circulating libraries, where library users would pay a subscription and take out one volume at a time. Whilst the three-decker was a suitable format in the 1830s and 1840s before the railways had properly developed, it had become an increasingly redundant format by the 1860s.⁶⁸ The fact that Blackwood's three-decker novels were too bulky and expensive to be sold at railway book stores meant that there was a huge market that Taylor and Blackwood's failed to reach.

In *Seeta* it is evident that Taylor and his new publisher King learned from the mistakes of both *Tara* and *Ralph Darnell* in terms of satiating a metropolitan readership and capitalising on his specific assets as a British-India author. The novel replays many of the tropes of *Tara*. The story takes place mainly in India and aims to document the native customs, traditions, and cultures that were particular to India. The novel, in a similar fashion to *Tara*, narrates a romance that transgresses cultural and religious boundaries. It likewise features an evil-plotting Brahmin who seeks to violate and possess the beautiful Hindu heroine and steal her away from her chosen husband. Crucially, though, there were key tropes in *Seeta* designed to make this narrative more palatable to a metropolitan readership. For one thing it is set in India's very recent past of the 1857 uprisings, an event within living memory of many British readers. The main character and hero of the novel is a white British colonial official called Cyril Brandon, a central character that metropolitan readers would more readily identify with than the Indian Muslim nobleman featured in *Tara*. Unlike Ralph Darnell, though, he is an uncomplicated example of white heroism and a mature patriarchal figure who is untarnished by a disreputable past. That *Seeta* loves and chooses Brandon over any Indian man serves to highlight the superiority of white imperial masculinity. Here sexist and patriarchal discourses frame the colonial enterprise in that *Seeta*'s

⁶⁷ Finkelstein, *The Study of the Works of Philip Meadows Taylor*, 18–24.

⁶⁸ Eliot and Nash, "Mass Markets: Literature," 423.

submission to the white man is a metonym for India's willingness to submit to patriarchal authority of colonial rule.⁶⁹

There is a clear gendered power dynamic between Brandon and Seeta which would have preserved and reinforced the cultural and racial hierarchies to which many metropolitan readers of the time would have subscribed. The fact that she is killed off and replaced at the end of the narrative by the more suitable white English lady, Grace Mostyn, ensures that the text aligned to the publisher's expectations of readers' tastes. The novel further reassures readers with a comforting return to Britain at the end of the narrative as Cyril Brandon inherits a landed estate and settles there to raise a family.

It is clear that the publisher and author thought *Seeta* had all the right ingredients and components to attract metropolitan readers with regard to its representation of the subcontinent. Its unfamiliar Indian content and representations of Indians and their daily lives were offset and balanced by a British hero. Whilst the villain of the novel, Azrael Pande, voices grievances about the effects of Company rule, his line of argument is discredited through the fact that he is a drug addict, kidnapper, murderer, and thief. Indian agency and resistance is thus neatly denigrated to preserve cultural hierarchies.

Seeta was an immediate success as a three-decker volume. On the basis of the promising initial sales figures, King released a one-volume novel at a cheaper price of six shillings later in the year.⁷⁰ This volume had much narrower page margins and a smaller font size than those novels previously published by Bentley and Blackwood's. The slimmer and lighter volume was designed so that it could be read while travelling on a train. It must be recognised that, with the extension of the railways in the mid-nineteenth century, the smoother train journeys facilitated the reading of a book with smaller print and narrow margins in a way that had not been possible for the bumpier horse and carriage journey. The real significance of the one volume edition of Taylor's work, though, was that it could be sold at the many WH Smiths railway book stores that flourished from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, opening up the author's work to a broader readership.⁷¹

A review of *Seeta* in *The Examiner* established a trend for the ways in which the author's works and life would be framed to the public. The reviewer begins by linking the novel to the context of Taylor's life, commenting on the difference between the conditions that a British Indian administrator currently confronted and those in which Taylor had worked at an earlier stage of British colonial India.

⁶⁹ See Kapila, "Educating Seeta," 211–41 and Sen, "The 'Loyal Indian Woman,'" 36–57.

⁷⁰ *The Graphic*, Saturday, August 9, 1873.

⁷¹ Stephen Colclough, "Distribution" in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain vol. 6 1830–1914*, edited by David McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2009), 238–80 and 250–51.

Mails were infrequent, personal communication with Europe was tedious and costly, and impeded by many service regulations. It was natural that men thus cut off from western influence should endeavor to make the best of their lot by cultivating friendly relations with the people by whom they were surrounded. But now all that is changed. The “competition” wallah takes to India simply as one career out of many, and probably in the majority of instances, not because he likes it the best, but because he wants money or interest for any other. He has no family ties or associations to bind him to the new land, and the old, is, as it were, ever before his eyes. He gets his English newspapers once a week, sees European telegrams in the local papers every morning, and knows the results of the Derby and the Leger a few minutes after we do in London. India is no home to him but a place of exile.... Colonel Meadows Taylor belongs wholly to the old order of things, and his manifest interest and even delight in the people whom he has so long helped to govern will strike many a young civilian of our day with astonishment. The terms of familiar intercourse on which he has been with many families have enabled him to know something of the Hindoo women of the upper classes, and the acquaintance he has gained with their characters and dispositions lends a special interest to his tales.⁷²

The review presents Taylor as belonging to an older generation of colonial administrator cut off from Britain and so forced to acculturate to life in the subcontinent and familiarise himself with its peoples. Taylor’s fictions are read by the reviewer as exemplifying a nostalgic return to a lost age of colonial romance and adventure. The reviewer actively invites a reading of these texts which situates Taylor’s “tales” in relation to his life as an older form of acculturated Indian administrator who had sympathy with the “natives.” Thus the review encourages the reader to take an imaginative journey to an earlier, more adventurous and individualistic stage of Empire. It also gives a perhaps somewhat fantastical impression that the modern British Empire is a professionalised and bureaucratic machine, and that Britain and colonial periphery have been brought seamlessly together, a fantasy that belies the fissures between the two. Moreover, the affiliation between the narrative of *Seeta* and the author’s own life is important if one considers that the hero of the novel, Cyril Brandon, is an idealised acculturated British colonial administrator who displays sympathy for the indigenous peoples. In this light, the review promotes a reading that draws direct parallels between the main character of the novel and the author.

The link between Taylor as an older form of British India colonial administrator and his literary works was also cultivated in his posthumously published autobiography, *The Story of My Life* (1877) and its subsequent reception by reviewers. Taylor’s autobiography, published by Blackwood and Sons, narrates the story of a self-made man who went out to India as a young boy without

⁷² *The Examiner* Saturday, February 15, 1873.

family connections or patronage, yet through his own efforts became the ideal colonial administrator. Throughout the narrative, Taylor, as an official working in the indirectly controlled Princely State of Hyderabad, represents himself as a man at the margins of British colonialism, without the privileges that a Company officer obtained in terms of pay, pension, and home leave. Even in these adverse circumstances, however, he portrays himself as striving to be an ideal administrator, a firm but fair ruler who, having learnt multiple Indian languages, converses on easy terms with his subjects. He is a patient and fatherly administrator who cannot bear to be parted from his people.⁷³ Without having received formal training, he masters land surveying, engineering and construction in order to improve and modernise the regions he administers. As a consequence of these improvements, as well as the friendly manner in which he interacts with his Indian subjects, Taylor claims he was adored by the people he ruled, who, according to the author, wept profusely when he left the territories for which he was responsible. In the preface of Blackwood's edition of Taylor's autobiography, his long-time friend Henry Reeve amplifies this self-representation:

He was one of the last of those who went out to India as simple adventurers—to use the term in no disparaging sense, for Clive and Dupleix were no more—and who achieved whatever success he had in life solely by his own energy and perseverance.... The time is past when so adventurous and singular a career is possible in India or elsewhere. The world grows more methodical, and routine takes the place of individual effort.⁷⁴

It is significant that Reeve frames Taylor's life in a similar fashion to the earlier review of *Seeta* in the *Examiner*, as exemplifying a type of romantic colonial adventurer and self-made man that could no longer exist in the more routinised machinations of empire or indeed in a heavily industrialised and bureaucratised late-Victorian Britain. He becomes the ideal colonial administrator from whom future East India Company officials can learn. Moreover, Reeve reinforces the connections between Taylor's career as a colonial administrator in India and the fictions he produced. According to Reeve there was "hardly a character in these volumes that was not drawn from some real person, whom he had seen and known in his various expeditions or in the repression of crime." Reeve goes on to add

⁷³ The image is slightly at odds with what Taylor writes in private correspondence with his friend Henry Reeve. There Taylor frequently expresses his loneliness and lack of companionship in India. See Letter 44 from Philip Meadows Taylor to Henry Reeve dated 25 October 1845 in Philip Meadows Taylor, *The Letters of Philip Meadows Taylor to Henry Reeve*, edited by Sir Patrick Cadell (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006), 191. Taylor was also officially reprimanded by the then Governor General, Lord Dalhousie, for his cultural insensitivity and heavy-handedness in his dealings with the Rani of Shorapur. See Letter 91 from Philip Meadows Taylor to Henry Reeve dated 10 September 1849 in Taylor, *The Letters of Philip Meadows Taylor to Henry Reeve*, 333–34.

⁷⁴ Taylor, *The Story of My Life*, xxxii–xl.

that Taylor possessed “an extraordinary force and flexibility of style, which brings the native of India, with his peculiar forms of language, his superstitions, his virtues and his crimes, within the range of the English reader, as no other work has done.”⁷⁵ Again the preface aims to establish a connection for readers between Taylor’s fictional representations of India and the author’s personal experiences of working in India and maintaining law and order. Yet Reeve also commodifies a mythic time—a time before the division of labour and late-Victorian capitalism, before the individual was alienated from his work.

Philip Meadows Taylor’s autobiography was favourably reviewed in the metropolitan press. Because it was released shortly after his death, many reviews also took on the quality of a eulogy. Henry Reeve’s preface clearly framed the responses which bought wholeheartedly into the idea of Taylor as an example of the colonial self-made man and the spirit of adventurism that predated the age of the impersonal and bureaucratised British Raj.⁷⁶ Taylor’s autobiography received favourable reviews in the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood’s Magazine*, which is unsurprising since Henry Reeve was the editor of the *Edinburgh Review* and William John Blackwood, Taylor’s former publisher, published *Blackwood’s Magazine*.⁷⁷ In the aftermath of his death and the reception of his autobiography, Taylor’s name circulated once again within the British print market. As Trev Lynn Broughton argues, Taylor, after the release of the autobiography, typified an earlier age of the British colonial period—an age associated with colonial adventurers who were more familiar with their Indian subjects.⁷⁸ What the potential reader is being sold is a particular brand of colonial ideology. The intention is that readers are not just consuming fictional representations of India but are buying into a constructed notion of Taylor’s identity as a British colonial administrator and an older, more romantic notion of British imperialism. By purchasing the fiction they are tapping into Taylor’s particular brand, one that blends white imperial masculinity and adventure. They are vicariously basking in the aura of imperial masculinity which these narratives emit.

The Afterlife of Meadows Taylor’s Fiction

Charles Kegan Paul, who had previously been the manager and editor for Henry King, bought the company from King, with the aid of his business partner

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁷⁶ *Liverpool Mercury*, (Liverpool, England), Tuesday, November 6, 1877; *The Newcastle Courant* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England), Friday, November 30, 1877; *Daily News*, Friday, December 7, 1877; and *The Examiner*, Saturday, December 15, 1877.

⁷⁷ Trev Lynn Broughton, “Promoting a Life: Patronage, Masculinity and Philip Meadows Taylor’s *The Story of My Life*” in *Life Writing and Victorian Culture*, edited by David Amigoni (London: Ashgate, 2006), 111.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 105–12.

Alfred Chenevix Trench. The company inherited the rights to all of Taylor's novels, King having previously purchased them from Blackwood's.⁷⁹ Kegan Paul, Trench & Trubner really prided itself on producing quality literature and educational material including poetry, scientific treatises, and religious works. Novels accounted for only 7.5 percent of its business, and were mainly reprints of what Kegan Paul would describe as "ordinary novels," a category to which the publisher evidently believed Taylor's novels belonged.⁸⁰ Kegan Paul, as noted earlier, believed that even an average author could be commercially successful as long as "it hits the fancy of the public or supplies the want just then felt."⁸¹ When Kegan Paul, Trench & Trubner re-released Taylor's novels, they all achieved commercial success. Their edition of *Confessions* sold over 5,000 copies in five editions between 1887 and 1897. Moreover, the publisher's edition of *Ralph Darnell*, which had been a marked commercial failure when originally published by Blackwood's, sold 3,900 copies between 1879 and 1900 in a single-volume reprint by Kegan Paul, Trench & Trubner.⁸²

This belated success stemmed from the ways that Kegan Paul adapted and packaged Taylor's novels to align with contemporary demands. Like *Seeta*, they were released in a single volume at a more affordable price of six shillings so that they could be sold at railway book stores and read on train journeys. In addition to this, however, Kegan Paul made some innovations. The books were marketed as "holiday reading," "Standard novels" and as "popular novels" in advertisements in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.⁸³ Kegan Paul was clearly attempting to reach out to a broader audience consisting of travellers who read fiction as escapism in their leisure time. Advertisements like this were crucial to creating a demand for disposable reading and also giving rise to a new category of reader who could be targeted. The educational aspects of the novels are totally dispensed with, and a new category of disposable reading is created, with the unexceptional aspects of his narratives promoted as a commercial asset. Nonetheless, the branding of Taylor's novels as "holiday" reading was perhaps helpful in that it inadvertently or advertently drew attention to the capacity of these works to take readers to the far away and exotic land of India. Reading these novels while travelling, rather than sitting at home or in a library, I would argue, could trigger the transmission of the escapist attributes of Taylor's narratives.

⁷⁹ Leslie Howsam, *Kegan Paul: A Victorian Imprint: Publishers, Books and Cultural History* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1998), 79.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 88, 98.

⁸¹ Kegan Paul, "Production and Life of Books," 487.

⁸² Finkelstein, *The Study of the Works of Philip Meadows Taylor*, 16 and 24–25

⁸³ See *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Thursday, July 8, 1880, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Saturday, August 8, 1885, and *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Saturday, September 4, 1886.

Kegan Paul also amplified the visual aesthetics of Taylor's novels for potential consumers, supplying frontispieces that depicted a key scene within each novel.⁸⁴ A caption described the scene and a page reference directed the reader to the incident illustrated. On one level, the images were intended to encourage and prolong the handling of the book to increase the chances that the individual consumer at the store, or the shopkeeper deciding which books to stock, would purchase the book. In this context, it was important that the illustration and scene from the novel chosen would be a selling point of the text. They were rather like modern cinematic trailers in that they sought to highlight the most sensationalistic aspects of the narrative in an effort to lure consumers. The illustrations were further significant in that they were an attempt to adapt the text to meet the perceived desires of readers. As the readers' first encounter with the text, the frontispieces would more than likely frame the subsequent interpretation of these narratives. They could also work to close down other narrative interpretations which did not neatly align with commercial interests.

It becomes apparent when examining Kegan Paul & Co.'s illustrations of Taylor's novels that certain motifs recur. In all of the illustrations a conflict is staged. In this respect, they preempt the conventions of contemporary journalism where a conflict is enacted in the headline, picture, or opening few paragraphs of a news story. In all of the illustrations, with the exception of *Ralph Darnell*, a conflict is staged among Indians in particular. The images temporarily freeze the idea of India as a place in a perpetual state of war with itself, and as a place where vulnerable young Indian women are under threat.⁸⁵ This is unsurprising, since all of these reprints were released by Kegan Paul in the wake of the Indian uprisings of 1857. In this respect, the novels' paratexts offer clear examples of the ways in which changing political circumstances within British India have informed the commodity context.

The frontispiece of *Tara* (see figure 1) depicts a scene in which the Hindu heroine, having been ostracised and had her honour questioned by Brahmins, as well as having been threatened with abduction by the lascivious Brahmin, Moro Trimmul, resolves out of desperation to commit Sati. That the publisher and illustrator should select a Sati scene as the selling point of the novel is consistent with the fact Sati was a familiar and popular trope in British fictional representations of India from the late-eighteenth century onwards. It was a trope

⁸⁴ In contrast, neither Bentley nor Blackwood's inserted frontispiece illustrations for their editions of Taylor's novels.

⁸⁵ See frontispiece illustrations in: Philip Meadows Taylor, *Confessions of a Thug* (London: C. Kegan Paul and Co., 1879); Philip Meadows Taylor, *Tippoo Sultaun: A Tale of Mysore War* (London: C. Kegan Paul and Co., 1879); Philip Meadows Taylor, *Tara: A Mahratta Tale* (London: C. Kegan Paul and Co., 1879); Philip Meadows Taylor, *Ralph Darnell* (London: C. Kegan Paul and Co., 1879); Philip Meadows Taylor, *Seeta* (London: C. Kegan Paul and Co., 1879).

that tapped into British rescue fantasies of saving young beautiful brown women from brown men.⁸⁶ Yet what is significant about this illustration is the way in which the visual illustrator has refracted this 'Indian scene' through a pre-existing European and Christian cultural viewpoint. Thus, instead of Brahmins sitting cross legged as they would do at a Hindu temple, they are seated as if sitting on pews while attending a church service. The temple with its gothic pillars resembles a medieval church, and the Brahmins themselves, with their whitened faces and long ponytails, resemble druids. Moreover, the Indian guard with his back turned and wearing chain mail armour resembles a chivalrous British knight. The publisher and illustrator have framed the story as European romance fiction, so that it is accessible and familiar to British readers. However, this example further demonstrates the power of these paratexts and advertisements to generate slippages from the objects to which they refer to create a series of other signs. Clearly Taylor was keenly aware of the differences between a Hindu temple and a church and the distinction between druids and Brahmins from his experience in the subcontinent. Yet this is a case of visual illustrator and the publisher who has to approve the illustration, both of whom were most likely to have been less knowledgeable about India than Taylor, selectively appropriating aspects of the text and adapting its tropes through cultural prisms with which they, and presumably the vast majority of Taylor's readership, would be more familiar. The frontispiece for *Seeta* (see front cover) again depicts a young Indian woman being attacked by an Indian rebel. The image is distinct from the illustrations of *Tippoo Sultaun*, *Tara*, and *Confessions* in that a powerful white male is present, resisting the Indian and enacting justice. Thus while the illustrations of Taylor's other narratives, with the exception of *Ralph Darnell*, are notable for the absence of a white male figure who can restore order and who has the potential to protect the women, in this picture such a figure exists. The frontispiece for *Seeta* is further unusual in that it gives away the climax of the story — that Seeta, Cyril Brandon's wife, dies saving her husband. Visually, in the image of Seeta dying, it is curious how the light hits her neckline; in the act of self-sacrifice for her English husband she becomes an honorary white woman. Moreover, the image also gestures at the denouement of the story, with Grace Mostyn, the white English lady, standing by Cyril Brandon's side ready to take the place of Seeta as Brandon's wife. One obvious question about this frontispiece is why the visual illustrator decided to give away the ending of the story and disrupt the author's sequencing of events?

⁸⁶ Gayatri Spivak has argued that this was indicative of the ways in which British colonialism in the early nineteenth century was often justified in terms of saving brown women from brown men. Consequently, the foregrounding of sati in colonial and missionary discourses of this time was discursively useful in terms of framing British colonial intervention in India as a patriarchal chivalrous rescue mission. See Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 305.



Figure 1: Frontispiece of Tara, depicting Tara's vow to commit Sati after having her honour attacked by the lascivious Brahmin villain, Moro Trimmul. Original caption reads, "Now listen, all ye Brahmins, I am true and pure, and I am Sutee henceforth."

One explanation is that it preempts the shock of an interracial relationship. By revealing the denouement of the narrative, the illustrator and the publisher, I argue, aim to reassure metropolitan readers that the interracial relationship will not last and that cultural norms will be restored at the end in the marriage of Cyril Brandon and Grace Mostyn. In effect, the illustration is an attempt to align the text more squarely with the perceived cultural and racial prejudices of the metropolitan readership.

Conclusion

The publisher's promotional material for Philip Meadows Taylor's novels clearly made a significant impact on whether or not they were successful. Bentley's advertisements for *Confessions* and *Tippoo Sultaun* aimed at instilling and creating prurient longings for these narratives within readers. The advertisements clearly had their own capacity to generate images and tropes concerning India. This power is evident in Bentley's and Kegan Paul's advertisements for the narratives. At the same time, tropes could be at odds with the narratives themselves. This was the case for Bentley's advertisements and well-placed puffs for *Tippoo Sultaun*, which ignored the main plot in favour of focusing more on the text's profile of the Mysore military leader and the generalised depiction of the orient. Yet reviews could have a significant impact on the manner in which Taylor's work could be promoted. A review for King's edition of *Seeta* drew attention to Taylor's acculturated status as the romantic outsider and conveyed to readers that the text provided a portal to access this aura of imperial masculinity, in which they could vicariously bask. Blackwood's was keen to learn from and to capitalise on this angle in its publication of Taylor's autobiography, by having a preface that framed his fiction as exemplifying a form of colonial nostalgia and adventurism. In the late-nineteenth century there was a change of commodity context with the expansion of the railways and railway literature. In such a context, Taylor's 'India' novels were promoted for their disposability and ordinariness, rather than their capacity to educate Britons about India. The Indian content and the author became irrelevant and marginalised in a context where the texts were intended merely to provide escapism during leisure time. Yet at the same time, the frontispiece illustrations for these novels generated their own tropes concerning India—a land perpetually at war with itself and where young women were under threat of dogmatic Indian masculinity. Such illustrations aligned with the changing colonial ideology in the wake of the Indian uprising of 1857, as well as with the journalistic conventions of the day, where conflicts were the selling points of news or feature stories. What is clear as well is the ways that the publishers' promotion of Taylor's narratives deviated from the texts themselves, whether in the frontispiece illustrations or in the advertisements in newspapers. These paratextual elements created their own signs pertaining to colonialism and race. Advertisements and paratexts

for nineteenth-century colonial novels provide rich source material for scholars investigating popular representations of colonialism and should be examined as texts in and of themselves that made significant contributions to the racial discourses of the nineteenth century.

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